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*Interview With Gen. John Vessey, Jr.,  
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*

# Why the U.S. Must Stay in the Arms Race

**America can deter the Soviets from going to war today, says the nation's top military officer. But all bets are off for tomorrow if present trends are not reversed.**

**Q** General Vessey, why does the Pentagon give Americans the impression that Russia produces near-perfect weapons and goes from strength to strength while the U.S. always has trouble with its weapons and is constantly plagued by problems in its defense buildup? Is the military situation really that bleak and lopsided?

**A** If the picture we have painted appears that grim to the public, then we have painted it inaccurately. It's fair to say that the Soviets have got all the same problems in producing high-technology weaponry that we have—maybe more. Besides, their troops are inferior to ours.

And while we in the United States are choking on the question of whether or not to spend 6.3, 6.4 or 6.5 percent of our gross national product for defense, the Soviets are spending 15 percent of their GNP for defense. That alone has got to give them great social and economic problems—and clearly it does.

But having said that, we must also recognize that the Soviets are continuing to build an enormous military arsenal. They are building far more than they would ever need for legitimate defense—and that concerns me.

**Q** Some U.S. intelligence analysts now claim that they may have overestimated the level of Soviet defense spending in recent years. Does that mean that the Soviet buildup has been exaggerated and that the U.S. can scale back its buildup accordingly?

**A** You have to put that whole issue into some perspective. It is undisputed that since the early 1970s Soviet military investment has far exceeded ours. By investment, I refer to the amount that they have spent on weapons and weapons research. The cumulative difference is very large—400 to 500 billion dollars—and that has not changed.

The argument within the intelligence community, such as there is one, is simply about whether the gap is continuing to grow at the same rate as before or whether it is starting to flatten out some. It's a technical argument that has very little bearing on what we need to do in our own defense budget. We still have to contend with the power the Soviets have bought with that extra 400 to 500 billion.

**EXCERPTED**